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ON HUMAN HAPPINESS.

BEING THE CONCLUSION OF THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF THE LATE
RICHARD KIRWAN, LL. D. &C. &C. BY JOHN O'REARDON, ESQ. M. D.

The philosopher's stone scarcely gave rise to more research among the alchemists, than happiness did among some distinguished literati of ancient and modern times. Plato maintains that the sovereign good is comprised in the cultivation of our powers of ratiocination, and in the practice of virtue. Cicero, in his treatise on real good and real evil, discusses the question with his wonted eloquence.

Maupertius, naturally of a gloomy and fretful disposition, says, that felicity consists in the amount of pleasures remaining after the subtraction of the ills of life; and that if Providence, to gratify us, could revoke all the time which we would desire to take from our existence, the life of an old man would be curtailed to a few minutes.

In a work of much antiquity attributed to Megeasias, physical and moral evil were pourtrayed in such frightful colours, and with such dangerous energy, that, to obviate the contagious alternative of suicide, its publication was suppressed by an Egyptian king. Helvetius composed a poem on Happiness. Pope's Essay on our being's end and aim is well known. Doctor Johnson's *Rasselas* presents a series of learned and brilliant dissertations on the same subject. But his august personages, after having successively ranged through various scenes and conditions of eastern life, and indulged in much metaphysical disquisition, came, at length, to a conclusion, in which nothing is concluded.

In the year 1809, Mr. Kirwan wrote a treatise on Happiness, which is interesting, as well for the sound reasoning as the extent of information which it displays. In his preface he observes, that the only happiness of whose attainment we can entertain any rational hope, or discover any instance in the present state of our existence, is of the mixed kind, made up indeed of pain and pleasure, but in such proportion as that, upon the whole, on balancing the account, the aggregate of pleasure exceeds that of pain. The four first chapters of this treatise are taken up with a description of the various pleasures and pains which mankind are capable of receiving, and their various degrees. He examines in the succeeding chapters, which of these opposite perceptions do at present predominate, or have, at any past period within our knowledge, always predominated during the whole course of human existence. To resolve, as far as the existing data permit, a question of so vast an extent, he views the condition of our species in each of the four different states in which it anciently existed, or is at present found, namely, the patriarchal, the barbarian, the savage, and the civilized. He believes that great harmony and happiness prevailed among men after the flood till the dispersion, that is, during 537 years, which is considered to have been the period of the golden age. But, with regard to the condition of mankind in the patriarchal state after the dispersion, he concludes that they could not in general have enjoyed domestic comfort, as they laboured under a radical defect from the practice of polygamy, and even of concubinage, which created jealousy and discord in their families.

He accounts the inhabitants of the barbarian states miserable, in consequence principally of the insecurity of life, liberty, and property among them, and the prevalence of laws and customs incompatible with general happiness.

After the survey which he takes of the principal circumstances of

savage life under every climate of the habitable globe, he deems it sufficiently apparent that it is far from being productive even of that approximation to happiness which man is capable of attaining. It is, however, acknowledged, that most savages, if not all, are through God's benignant providence, content with their desolate situation ; but it by no means follows that they are happy.

He finally comes to the civilized state, where is principally to be found any degree of felicity that can be reasonably expected in this life. The civilized state is that in which different families are associated for the protection of their natural rights, namely, life, liberty, property, and safety, together with such advantages as may be gained by the united power of the society. It originated in the cessation of the general patriarchal government, when the different families of mankind were no longer subject to a common parent. The degrees of civilization are various according to the variable extent and degree of protection and security afforded to the natural rights of men ; and the number and importance of the advantages procured for them by the powers of the society. The lowest degree of civilization is that in which protection is unequally distributed. Hence, the nations in which unequal laws prevail, and any particular class or sect of the society, are injured, or not sufficiently protected and encouraged, even supposing those of the higher classes to be respected, must be deemed semi-civilized. The inhabitants of all civilized countries may be ranged under four general divisions, viz.—the opulent, the rich, the poor, and the indigent. Our Author differs from Dr. Paley, who affirms, that happiness is uniformly distributed among the different orders of civil society. It appears very evident, says Mr. Kirwan, that in whatever aspect we view the condition of the labouring poor, its pains will be found far to exceed its pleasures, both in number, duration, and poignancy ; and consequently far inferior to the share of happiness which the rich have at least the power of enjoying, but the poor have not, supposing both governed alike by the rules of prudence. A mind continuing in the exercise of the intellectual faculties in philosophical pursuits, with the concurrence of certain necessary circumstances, bids fair for the enjoyment of pleasures as pure and as free from adventitious pains as can be found in the present state of our existence. Next to the gratification resulting from the exercise of the understanding, and the pleasures of the moral sense, comprised in acts of benevolence and piety, we may rank those of the imagination, in the composition of poetry, painting, and music ; to which may be added, the study of the sacred Scriptures and of the doctrines of Christianity, as by far the most satisfactory and consolatory.

To this concluding article on the life of Kirwan, which a want of space has obliged us to abridge, we have great pleasure in appending the following very just eulogium, pronounced by Dr. O'Reardon on the subject of his sketch.

Mr. Kirwan wrote in a correct, free, and adequately rich style. His sentences are natural and clear as his thoughts. His expressions are well chosen, and appropriate to the subject, which is in itself always interesting and important. There is nothing trivial or low, and, at the same time, no studied pomp in his diction. His published works acquired for him a distinguished station among the most philosophical and scientific of the late authors of Europe, and secured his rank among our chief literati and moralists. Love of virtue, benevolence of disposition, liberality of sentiment, an enlightened and warm, though modest,

spirit of patriotism and general philanthropy, which are the attributes of every sound and well-regulated mind, were unquestionably his. He was not free from some domestic peculiarities of character, arising partly from delicacy of constitution, and partly from a retired and contemplative habit of life. His manners, at the same time, were those of a perfect gentleman—easy, courteous, and obliging: his conversation, polite, entertaining, and instructive, of which his lettered friends, for the enjoyment of whose company he generally set apart two hours every evening at his house in Rutland-square, had ample experience. He was altogether an honour to Ireland; where, with regard to universality of acquirements, and depth in so many distinct departments, he has not left his equal behind him. He was no great discoverer, and was inferior to some other philosophers of his time in particular branches of science, to which their time and talents were almost exclusively devoted. It is, however, indisputable, that among his scientific contemporaries and even successors, he has been equalled only by few, and scarcely surpassed by any in the wide circle of general knowledge, except, perhaps, by a Humboldt or a Cuvier. The following sentence, taken from Quintilian's encomiums on the learning of some of the sages of Greece and Rome, is, with a slight alteration, completely applicable to our illustrious author—*"Quæ tandem ars digna literis Platoni defuit?"* We may well say—*"Quæ tandem ars digna philosophiæ et literis Kirwano defuit?"*

SONNET.

WRITTEN DURING A RESIDENCE NEAR THE BLACKWATER.

'Twas evening, and gray shadows mantled o'er
 The eastern sky—the loud voiced wind was still,
 The wave, like sheeted silver met the shore,
 The distant lighter neared the winding mill,
 And many an echo answered, from the hill,
 The boatman's chaunt—as, pausing on his oar,
 (Feeling what joys the poor man's bosom fill,
 When toil is past, and home and rest before;
 He gaily sang his homeward ditty shrill.
 I gazed upon thy waters, Avonmore,
 And albeit then my bosom thoughts were chill,
 Darkened by many a broken hope—and wore
 The colouring that my fate had stamped them—still
 Like a soft dream thy scenes did thro' my spirit thrill!

C.

THE OUTCAST.

"Rage on ye winds—burst, clouds—and waters roar!
 Ye bear a just resemblance to my fortune,
 And suit the gloomy habit of my soul."—YOUNG,

It was sometime after the memorable defeat of the rebels at Vinegar-hill, that a vessel left the harbour of Cork, bound for one of the American ports. Its deck was crowded with persons of the lower order of peasantry, all gazing mournfully on the fast receding coast; some leaving their country from political causes, others to seek on a foreign shore, peace, and the means of subsistence—blessings which were denied them at home. By one alone of all that throng, was the dim and fading outline of the distant hills disregarded—a tall and muscular man, about